

North Central Valley
JACL/CSUS Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

with

Chiyo Mitori Shimamoto

April 8, 1998
Lodi, California

By Arleen Mataga
for
Lodi JACL

Consortium of JACL Chapters
Florin-French Camp-Lodi-Placer-Stockton
California State University, Sacramento
Special Collections/University Archives
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*California State University, Sacramento
Special Collections / University Archives*

MISSION STATEMENT

To collect and preserve the historical record of the multigenerational experience of Japanese Americans and others who befriended them in the communities of the JACL Chapters of this Consortium. The books produced will enhance the CSUS/Japanese American Archival Collection housed in the California State University, Sacramento Archives for study, research, teaching and exhibition. This unique Collection of life histories provides a permanent resource for the use of American and international scholars, researchers and faculty, as well as a lesson for future generations to appreciate the process of protecting and preserving the United States Constitution and America's democratic principles.

PREFACE

This JACL/CSUS Oral History Project provides completed books and tapes of Oral Histories presented to the interviewed subjects, to the California State University, Sacramento/Japanese American Archival Collection, and to the local JACL Chapters. Copyright is held by the Consortium of JACL Chapters and California State University, Sacramento. Photocopying is limited to a maximum of 20 pages per volume. Photographic rights of the primary portrait of interviewees are held by Gail Matsui Photography.

This project will continue the mission of the Florin JACL which recognized the necessity of interviewing Japanese Americans: "We have conducted these interviews with feelings of urgency. If we are to come away with lessons from this historic tragedy, we must listen to and become acquainted with the people who were there. Many of these historians are in their seventies, eighties and nineties. We are grateful that they were willing to share their experiences and to answer our questions with openness and thoughtfulness." This same urgency to conduct interviews is felt by the other North Central Valley (Sacramento/San Joaquin Valley) JACL Chapters. There are still many stories that must be told.

The Oral Histories in the Japanese American Archival Collection relate the personal stories of the events surrounding the exclusion, forced removal and internment of civilians and permanent resident aliens of Japanese ancestry. There is a wide variety of interviews of former internees, military personnel, people who befriended the Japanese Americans, Caucasians who worked in the internment camps and others, whose stories will serve to inform the public of the fundamental injustice of the government's action in the detention of the Japanese aliens and "non-aliens", so that the causes and circumstances of this and similar events may be illuminated and understood.

The population of those who lived through the World War II years is rapidly diminishing, and in a few years, will altogether vanish. Their stories must be preserved for the historians and researchers today and in the future.

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER

Arleen Mataga is a Lodi JACL member and recording secretary. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree and secondary teaching credential from California State University, Los Angeles.

INTERVIEW TIMES AND PLACES

April 8, 1998
at the home of Chiyo and Iwao Frank Shimamoto
174 E. Woodbridge Road
Woodbridge, California

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PHOTOGRAPHY

The primary photograph was taken by Gail Matsui, JACL member, French Camp chapter.

TAPES AND INTERVIEW RECORDS

Copies of the bound transcript and the tapes will be kept by the Lodi Japanese American Citizens League and in the University Archives at the Library, California State University, Sacramento, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, California 95819.

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Chiyo Mitori Shimamoto was born on June 20, 1921 on King Island, California. Her parents, Kango and Katsume, were immigrants from Kumamoto, Japan.

Chiyo's parents, older sister Kimi and infant Chiyo moved to Escalon, California where father Kango was a foreman on a large ranch. After four years in Escalon, the third daughter Ida was born. Shortly, they moved to Stockton, California where Kango engaged in truck farming. Twelve years later, Kango moved the family back to Escalon where he became a sharecropper on the same ranch of one hundred and sixty five acres. The Mitori family consisted of the parents and eight daughters and one son.

Chiyo left the family after she graduated from Escalon High School. First, she worked as a maid in San Mateo, and later enrolled in the Oakland School of Hairdressing. Finishing just as Pearl Harbor was bombed, she returned to Escalon to prepare to enter the Stockton Assembly Center with her family. Six months later the whole family was interned in Rohwer Concentration Camp, Arkansas.

Chiyo left Rohwer and worked in St Paul, Minnesota as a hairdresser. She married Sgt. Iwao Frank Shimamoto there. While Iwao was in Military Intelligence in the Philippines, son Rodney was born.

After Iwao's discharge from the Army, they spent a brief period in Bismarck, North Dakota, but soon decided to return to their farming roots in the Lodi area where Iwao had relatives. Chiyo and Iwao leased land and grew strawberries until they were able to buy a farm of their own. There, they grew strawberries and then Tokay grapes, and two more children, second son Grant and daughter Faith.

In 1962, Chiyo started her own beauty salon, Chiyo's Hairstyling, in Lodi, while Iwao continued the farming. She managed her business which grew to a one time maximum of five full-time employees until her retirement in 1983.

After retirement, Chiyo performed volunteer work at the Lodi Memorial Hospital, the San Joaquin County Historical Museum, the Lodi Buddhist Women's Association, and the Lodi Garden Club. Chiyo also fulfilled a childhood interest in drawing, finding a medium in water colors.

Chiyo and Iwao Shimamoto continue to live on their scaled-down farm in Lodi, California. They garden both vegetables and flowers and maintain a koi pond surrounded by twenty or thirty domestic rabbits which have taken up residence in their woodpile.

Oldest son Rodney is an R.N. and teaches emergency medical training. Rodney and his wife Jean live in Lodi. Rodney has two daughters, one son, and one granddaughter. Second son Grant is a genetic researcher. He and his wife Kathy have four sons and live in Newberry Park, California. Daughter Faith and her husband Kevin Blackwell are engineers and live in Stockton, California.

[Session 1, April 8, 1998]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

MATAGA: [This Oral History Interview is being conducted] for the North Central Valley JACL/CSUS¹ Oral History Project with a grant from the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund. This interview is for the Lodi Japanese American Citizens League Chapter. Today's date is April 8, 1998. The interviewee is Chiyo Mitori Shimamoto. The interviewer is Arlene Mataga. [Yoshi Yamauchi was also present at this interview and was identified at the end of the interview.]

Okay, Chiyo. Family and home life. Where and when were you born?

SHIMAMOTO: June 20, 1921 on King Island in the San Joaquin Delta.

MATAGA: What did your father do?

SHIMAMOTO: He did farm labor [inaudible]. I have things here about my parents, if you would like to hear it.

MATAGA: It would be wonderful, yes.

SHIMAMOTO: Both of my parents were born in Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan, and they lived across the road from each other. And

¹ Japanese American Citizens League and California State University, Sacramento

my father [Kango Mitori] was born on March 22, 1889, and mother [Katsume Mitori]] was born March 22, 1899. Ten years' difference. They were second cousins. [Being second cousins, their last names were both Mitori.] In 1907, father went to the U.S.A. when he was eighteen years of age, and ten years later, mother followed him in 1917 at the age of 18.

MATAGA: Why did they come?

SHIMAMOTO: My father was sent because in Japan in those days, only the oldest son inherited everything. And the rest of them just had to shift for themselves. He couldn't divide his land any more because it got to be so small. So they put their money together and sent Kango over. The thing is, he had a grand old time.

MATAGA: [Chuckle] Even not speaking English, huh?

SHIMAMOTO: No. He had a motorcycle and he'd go up and down the valley. I had a picture of him, but it disappeared some place. Anyway, after ten years, his parents decided that he needed a wife. So they sent mom over and when she landed in San Francisco she said, "Oh, my cousin."

MATAGA: Oh, she didn't even know? [Laughter] The arranged. . .

SHIMAMOTO: She was supposed to have been married around that time, but we can't find the records. I have thought that she was *Shashin kekkon*. You know what that is.

YAMAUCHI: Picture bride.

MATAGA: Picture bride?

SHIMAMOTO: But that was not true. They were married after, when she came. Father took mom to an island on the delta where my oldest sister Kimi was born. And then he moved to King's Island, and two years later I was born. And when I was an infant, we moved to Escalon, California. Do you want me to go on?

MATAGA: Yes, please.

SHIMAMOTO: And there he was a foreman on this big ranch. And the third sister, Ida Aiko, was born, and when she was an infant, he decided to try his luck in Stockton. So, he hauled us all off to Stockton and he started his truck farming.

[My father, Kango first rented three acres and he, Mom and the two older of us sisters helped him build our single walled dwelling. Father made many of his farm equipment. All of us who were able helped raise vegetables, pick and prepare them for Father to sell at the Stockton, California wholesale market. Since Japanese could only rent land for three years, we moved often building our houses each time we moved. I can recall all the hard work, mostly on our hands and knees all year long before and after school and every day in the summer. We went to Linden Japanese School on weekends and weekdays during summers. The Japanese school bus took us to school and

then took us home. I was in book nine when we left Stockton for Escalon, California.]*

MATAGA: Did you help on the farm, too, then?

SHIMAMOTO: Yes.

MATAGA: And your sisters?

SHIMAMOTO: It's in my book there. [*To the Land of Bright Promise: The Story of a Pioneer Japanese Truck Farming Family in California's San Joaquin Valley* by Chiyo Mitori

Shimamoto] All about that. When I was sixteen, my father decided to go back to Escalon because the man that was running the place was called home to Japan. And so, my father went sharecropping. So, all the equipment will be there. And it used to be a big, thriving farm, but it ended up with just my father and us. We were the laborers.

MATAGA: Hmm. Where did you go to school?

SHIMAMOTO: I went to school in Stockton. Montezuma School and Elmwood School.

MATAGA: Was it a grammar school?

SHIMAMOTO: Grammar school. And then I went to Stockton High School. In my second year of high school, we had moved to Escalon. By then, there were six girls and one little boy. And. . . no, there were seven girls and one boy [Kimi, Chiyo,

* Mrs. Shimamoto added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

Ida Aiko, Ayako, Ishi, Mutsuko Alice, Robert Minoru, and Jean Tsukimi]. And then after we went to Escalon, the last one was born. It was a girl [Ann Yae], again. There were eight girls and one boy. So, my brother is the third from the end. I think that is about what you would like to hear? You want to hear more?

MATAGA: Always more. How about scouting or [inaudible] picnics, or following Japanese culture?

SHIMAMOTO: We went to the local Japanese community picnics. My father was very, very old fashioned, being raised in Japan. He had all these daughters that he had to take care of, so he would not let us join any club, or go to any social functions, or anything like that. We just worked and went to school. We also had to have good grades, or else.

MATAGA: Would he spank you?

SHIMAMOTO: No, he buried us. [Laughter] And my older sister and I got perfect attendance for three years in grammar school. And in high school, Escalon High School, I belonged to the CSF. California Scholarship Federation. I guess that's still not enough. When I finished. . . . Let me tell you a little bit about our work. When we went to Escalon, I was sixteen. There were two tractors and seven horses and all the farm equipment. A windmill ran the water tank for our drinking water. Our hundred acres was bottom land, so we

SHIMAMOTO: didn't have to irrigate that. And the top sixty five acres was hay for the horses. So, to plant the hay, three of us would line up with buckets and scatter the hay seeds as we went up and down the hill. My father would mow the hay when it was ready, and my sister Kimi would take the hay rake with the team of horses and make piles. And when it was ready to go into the barn, we hitched up the horses to the wagon and went out to the field and with our hay forks. We would haul the hay onto the wagon. Through this experience, we found out that you have to make a high edge around the perimeter of the wagon bed with hay first before you fill the inside, otherwise it all slides off of there.

[Inaudible] And we would haul it over to the barn and my father would put his big fork in the hay on the wagon and it would run on runners to the other side of the barn where mom had the horse hitched to the runners on the ceiling to draw the fork full of hay into the barn. My father would yell, and mom would walk the horse slowly, and the horse would pull the big fork full of hay. And then when he would yell again, then she would stop and he would pull the rope and the hay would fall down in there. And that way he could judge where to put it. Our job of hauling the hay was not very good, because we were after all children. And it was hard work and hay was sticking in our neck, and

it would itch. And that went on about a week before we got the barn all filled.

MATAGA: What was in the hundred acres bottom, what was there?

SHIMAMOTO: Oh, that was spinach in the wintertime, and dry beans in the summer. That's what it always was.

MATAGA: Did you help with that, too?

SHIMAMOTO: Yes. We hoed up and down, and a hundred acres is an awful big place. One day we worked in a little cove, a corner, because the Stanislaus River was on the other side. Mother had these jugs of tea and she would put one every so many yards and we would hoe one jug to the other to drink tea and that day it was a hundred and ten degrees.

MATAGA: Oh, my gosh.

SHIMAMOTO: When we got done, sucking our stomach in and out, and you can hear the water swishing.

MATAGA: [Laughter] Did your father actually own the land?

SHIMAMOTO: No. He was the. . .

MATAGA: Sharecropper?

SHIMAMOTO: Sharecropper. The owner of the land was a Swiss Italian Oakland businessman, and he rented it to George Yabuki, who was a. . . his wife was a Nisei, older Nisei. Thus, Mr. Yabuki was able to rent land for years. So they had been running this place for a long, long time. And so we had to do what he said. When the beans was ready, he would run

SHIMAMOTO: the cutter pulled by horses through the bean field, and then my older sister would ride her horse and the rake, and rake it into rows. And we had to go along and make piles. And there was one beans, the black-eyed beans had runners, all connected to each other, and so when you would pull, the whole row would start coming. We would sweat making these piles. When it was ready to be threshed. . . in those days, the thresher didn't go up and down the rows like it does today. We had to haul it on a wagon, take it to the threshing machine where my father had the threshing machine started with the belt from the tractor that turns the whole thing. So, here we are on the wagon, two of us on top of the wagon with our hay forks, struggling to put the beans plants on the moving belt, and then two of us down below by the chute when the sacks will be filled and we would quickly sew it and two of us would both throw it onto the wagon. Then, you would reverse, and I would be down below and the others would be up above. And at the end of the day, we coughed up dirt.

MATAGA: Ooh.

SHIMAMOTO: And our faces were so black, you couldn't tell what color we were. We actually were trembling, we were so tired. And my father was busy monkeying with the tractor, and mom was picking up little beans that would escape off. One thing

about our family, mom was very resourceful. When the beans plants were just young and the beans were about an inch long, she would pick them and cook them with bacon. Bacon was our meat, and that was our stir-fry. And when the beans got a little older, she would shell them and cook it the same way. I don't care for green lima beans to this day.

MATAGA: [Laughter]

SHIMAMOTO: After they were dried, mom would soak some beans and cook it with some water and mash it up and put a little sugar in it, and that would be our butter. And she would cook it in water and bacon and that was our stir-fry. It would get stuck down our throat because everything was dry. She made the fillings for pumpkin pie with beans. I don't know what else she did. . . oh, she made dumpling with flour and hot water, she'd mix it and then she'd squeeze it with her fingers and dump it into this pot of beans with a lot of water and sugar in there, and we would eat it. It would go kerplunk right in our stomach and sit there all day.

MATAGA: [Chuckle]

SHIMAMOTO: So beans is not my favorite thing.

MATAGA: [Chuckle] You had your share, huh?

SHIMAMOTO: Then, all the way to school, we would have much flatulents. [laughter]

MATAGA: Oh. [Laughter]

SHIMAMOTO: There was a little creek right down below where the water from the upper land would drain into this creek. And there used to be little carps in there. And we would on our free time, we would sit between the leaves of grass with our stick with our bent pins and the worms and catch little fish. Take them home and mom would cook it with *sato-joyu* [sugar and soy sauce mix].

MATAGA: Nice change from beans, huh?

SHIMAMOTO: Right.

MATAGA: Did you have Caucasian friends in school or at that time?

SHIMAMOTO: Just at school. We weren't allowed to bring anybody home. I had quite a bit of friends there, because I was always joking and cutting up.

MATAGA: What about when you were a teenager, did you date Caucasians or. . .?

SHIMAMOTO: No. That's a no-no. I got to go to our operetta program when I was a senior to sell candy for the CSF. That was the only time. And then I went to Treasure Island [in San Francisco Bay] when it was a fair, the World's Fair, with my CSF group.

MATAGA: So, with school, you were able to go places. Rather than that, work at home.

SHIMAMOTO: Just home.

MATAGA: What church?

SHIMAMOTO: Oh. My father said if you're not good, you'd better go to church. Otherwise, you don't have to go.

MATAGA: [Laughter]

SHIMAMOTO: I don't know if I should say that or not. But we absorbed Buddhism by our parents' talks and actions. Other than that we didn't have any. . . .

One of the speeches that I gave in later years in Lodi, my subject was holidays because it was Christmas time. And I talked about as I was growing up, I didn't know any English words when I started first grade. I think I cried about a week because I didn't know what the teacher was saying or the students were saying.

MATAGA: You just spoke Japanese at home.

SHIMAMOTO: And when nobody was looking, I would run off to the bathroom. The following year when I went back, the teacher said, I am in the third grade now. Well, when they gave me time tables and division, I didn't know what it was all about. So teacher would try to explain, and I didn't know what she was saying. I'd go home and my father would scream and lecture at me, because I didn't understand what he was saying. So, I just gave up and I just guessed and put any kind of numbers. And so, of course, I stayed in the

SHIMAMOTO: third grade two years. It's not good to skip children. They miss a lot.

I was talking about the speech I gave at Christmas time. It was to a Methodist Church. . . no, the Presbyterian Church in Lodi. And I told them about how at New Years time we had all this celebration of mochi [pounding of sweet rice cakes] and all the delicious foods and different traditions. Then at school nobody knew anything about it. At Christmas time, the kids were all excited about what mom and pop were going to give them or the relatives were going to give them. And I pretended like I had uncles and aunts that were going to give me things. And my sisters and I went and hauled a tumble weed home. Today, that's fashionable, but it wasn't in those days. We hauled it home and hung paper chains and the little swans that we folded. My parents never said anything about it. But, the minute I started school, the teacher was talking about Jesus, about Joseph and his coat of many colors, and all these Christian stories. And then we had this Christmas tree, my first time in seeing that and all these Christmas songs. And I would go home, and nothing. It was such a hard thing to adjust to two different cultures. We had our foot in one side, and a foot in the other side. As we were growing older, there were subjects that we would like to talk with our parents

about, but we didn't know the Japanese words for it. And our parents wanted to ask us a lot of questions about school and things like that and what we were thinking, we didn't know what they were saying. So I think this was typical of the Niseis of that day, and their parents lost a very valuable time in their growing up years.

Now I am off on a tangent. What?

MATAGA: Okay.

SHIMAMOTO: Do you want me to go on from high school?

MATAGA: M-m-hum.

SHIMAMOTO: When I finished high school, I decided that I was not going to get into a rut. In other words, to find me a husband and I'll marry and have a bunch of kids. So, I got a job in San Mateo doing housework and the wife of the man that we were working for, Mrs. Yabuki, managed to get me a scholarship to Oakland School of Hairdressing. So, I went there nine months and I was studying for my State Board which would be held in San Francisco, when Pearl Harbor was bombed. [December 7, 1941] On the way going home from the Beauty School on Monday, because that happened on Sunday. . . on Monday, so many Caucasian people were staring at me, and it made me very nervous. And when I went back to school, it was a very cool reception towards

me, and it was very difficult. I had to get a special permit to go to San Francisco to take my State Board.

MATAGA: How was it prior to that? How did they treat you before?

SHIMAMOTO: Before that, there was no prejudice. We learned. . . the Nisei learned as they were growing up that there is certain areas that you don't go into, or you don't ask or talk about. So, we just stayed away from those subjects. If I tried to get involved with the Caucasian kids, I probably would have felt prejudice. My best friend at Beauty School was a Chinese girl. And I took my State Board then the. . . what is that order? 9. . .

MATAGA: [Executive Order] 9066.

SHIMAMOTO: 9066? I had to hurry up and get home. So, I didn't even know whether I passed my State Board or not, but I bought me a sleeping bag, and went home. My mother was frantic, because we had only one week before we left, and we could only take what we could carry. We didn't know whether we were going to come back or where we were going. And father went every day down to the field and worked the tractor. "Roosevelt's not going to put me in one of those places, because I never did anything wrong." That's what he would say. So, every day he went down there. My older sister had already married and gone to Lodi, so, I was the oldest. So, mom, I and the two younger ones opened all our

drawers, cupboards, closets, and our bedding. We dragged them all outside and poured kerosene over it and threw a match onto it. And we managed to have enough left, so we could carry it.

When they were having a discussion about Pearl Harbor at Lodi High School about ten years ago, one of the teachers asked. . . social studies teachers asked me to talk about my Pearl Harbor experience. And so, I talked to three classes at that school, and one of the first things I would do, I would give them a piece of paper and tell them to write down what they would take if they were sent away, they didn't know where they were going or if they will ever come back, and they can only take what they can carry. Most everybody had a blank paper. One boy said, "I'll take my credit card."

MATAGA: [Laughter]

SHIMAMOTO: That was three classes, that was Tokay High School. And at Lodi High School, I talked to four classes. That was taped. I have a tape of that. I had the same experience.

MATAGA: So, your father finally did go, I assumed to the camp?

SHIMAMOTO: I went to all the utility companies and told when we would leave and you know, all that. The horses we gave to one of the neighbors. Another neighbor bought our tractors. Mom had this big steamer trunk that she had brought from

Japan that had Japanese clothes in. So, in there she put pop's homemade carpenter tools, because my father was very adept at making things with his hands, and our family pictures and a few other things. That was about all she could put in there, and we took it to one of our Italian neighbors to save for us. Mom had a White sewing machine that pop bought her when she first came to the United States. And they took that, too. It wasn't crated up good so when we were finally able to get it, it was all in pieces. We had to throw it away. So that all we had of our former life was what was in that trunk.

MATAGA: What camp did you go to?

SHIMAMOTO: Rohwer. We went to Rohwer, Arkansas. First we went to...

MATAGA: Stockton?

SHIMAMOTO: Stockton Assembly Center. About six months, I think.

YAMAUCHI: That's where I went, too.

SHIMAMOTO: Then we went on the train. I think it was three days. There was a soldier, a GI between each car with a machine gun. We went way out into the desert down south, and they stopped the train the soldiers got out, and they made a half circle around the train with machine guns pointing toward us, and then we got to get out and stretch our legs. Of course, we wondered where we were going and what was

SHIMAMOTO: going to happen to us, whether we'll ever see California, again.

I forgot to tell you about my father. When I finally told him that we were going to leave now, you can't work anymore. We're going to leave. He sold our truck to one of the neighbors and the neighbor came in to the yard with the truck and we piled our possessions on the back. Being poor, we didn't have suitcases, we just had boxes tied up. And my father, he was bent over and prematurely gray with all his hard work that he'd been working, he slowly climbed up into the truck. With tears in my eyes, I watched him. I will never forget that scene. Three years later he died of a heart attack. He never got his pep back after we left for camp.

After we went into camp, a few months later, there were different business concerns [in the midwest and east] sending brochures to entice us to go and work for them. And there was. . .

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

MATAGA: This is still Tape 1, and this is Side 2. Okay, when you were in camp you were able to go out?

SHIMAMOTO: This man Charles Ray had a Beauty Shop and a Beauty School in St. Paul, Minnesota. And he was requesting girls. So, I corresponded with him. I had to have a place to stay

SHIMAMOTO: before I could go. They had to check my background to make sure that I was safe to leave. So, I went and he met me at the train depot and took me to this slum area where I had one room. While I was in camp, I would order machineless home permanents from Sears or Montgomery Ward, and I used to give permanents in my little room for a few dollars. Well, I saved that. Besides, they gave me some money to go out of the camp. I started Beauty School and I was running out of money. Then I met this very nice Japanese couple who had always lived in Minnesota. They befriended me and they talked me into going to live with Miss Luella Miles who was a retired World History teacher. That was one of the best things that ever happened to me. She introduced me to the operas, and we would go to the operas. I went to see Fritz Kreisler playing his violin and Marian Anderson and Lily Pons sing. I was able to go and experience that. And she would take me to political meetings and we both joined the Farmer Labor Party and I shook hands with Henry Wallace and Hubert Humphrey.

MATAGA: This was still during when the war was going on.

SHIMAMOTO: It was still going on.

MATAGA: Because in St. Paul, Minnesota, you were able to go to and see those kinds of things, really.

- SHIMAMOTO: And then when I left the camp, my father told Frank [Shimamoto] to come and see me once in a while to make sure I was all right. He was in the Military Intelligence at Fort Snelling, Minnesota.
- MATAGA: You mean Frank, your husband. Future husband.
- SHIMAMOTO: So, he would come once a week, twice a week, Soon every other day. [Laughter] So we got married. Had a little boy when my husband was overseas. No. Before I had the baby boy, Iwao Frank went overseas. The baby was named Rodney Akira. My husband was a year and a half overseas. So Miss Miles was delighted that she could be a surrogate mother. She went with me to the hospital, the whole works.
- MATAGA: [inaudible]
- SHIMAMOTO: Oh. We were married about three months when he went overseas. My father didn't want me to get married because if I married a GI, I might become a widow. But we just went ahead anyway. I got a job near Miss Miles' home in a beauty shop in the residential area and it was very nice there.
- MATAGA: And you were doing hair?
- SHIMAMOTO: Yes. Then. . .
- MATAGA: Did you have any problems doing hair for Caucasian people?
- SHIMAMOTO: No. That's all I did before, too.

VIA BEAM SYDNEY

T.G. 42 B.

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TELEGRAM

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BEAM 236/ QSB 57/22 ND W 413 STPAUL MINN 16/15 21

No. 22 JUN 1944

IWA0 SHIMAMOTO

39016711 AMLOVE QLD

7TH U.S.A. BASE P.O. X118

SON JUNE 21 EVERYTHING FINE DONT WORRY LOVE

... CHIYO SHIMAMOTO

(IWA0 SHIMAMOTO 3916711 21)

Telegram received by
(IWA0)
Frank, while serving
in military intelligence in
New Guinea.

Announcing birth of first child
Rodney, born on June 21, 1944

BE SURE TO FULLY ADDRESS MAIL
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JUN
23
1944

SERVICES

IDLE TALK CAN SINK SHIPS—
THINK TWICE BEFORE YOU SAY IT

MATAGA: So, they didn't discriminate? They didn't treat you any different?

SHIMAMOTO: No. Japanese were strangers. They had never seen Japanese before in that area. In fact, one fellow asked me if I was French. I said I was French Indian.

MATAGA: [Laughter]

SHIMAMOTO: And then my husband was a war casualty and they shipped him back to the states, so he came to St. Paul and I think he was working at the special camp where the troublemakers. . . Japanese troublemakers were in. . . in Bismarck [North Dakota]. He was interpreting there. And we got the telegram that my father died. My family had moved to St. Louis by then. So we packed up everything and we left. We went down there to the funeral and then we came back to Lodi where his uncle, Mr. T. Yamanaka, lived. So we helped in the grapes and started strawberry planting, too.

MATAGA: [Inaudible] owned by them. The vineyard was owned by Mr. Yamanaka.

SHIMAMOTO: There's six years difference between my first and second child.

MATAGA: And you had your second child here in California?

SHIMAMOTO: Yes. Rodney was born in Minneapolis, I mean St. Paul, and Grant was born in Stockton General Hospital. I think I paid

\$33.00 to the hospital. And our daughter Faith was born at Buchanan Hospital in Lodi. And that was it.

MATAGA: She's the youngest?

SHIMAMOTO: Yes. She's the third one. And we ended up raising strawberries for eighteen years. Yoshi Yamauchi came to work for us here in Lodi for one season.

MATAGA: Oh.

YAMAUCHI: [Inaudible]

MATAGA: Did you own your land then, or were you. . .

SHIMAMOTO: We were renting then. Oh, no. We owned a little house in town, and then we bought this house and raised strawberries around here. This is where we worked. And then things got kind of bad, so my husband went to work for a vineyardist driving tractor, irrigating, and then on weekends he would take care of our little place. And I went to Stockton to Beauty School and brushed up for three months and got a job in Lodi. I worked there three years, and then I started my own shop, and I had that for twenty one years.

MATAGA: Hmm. In Lodi?

SHIMAMOTO: In Lodi. I had myself and three girls working for me.

Before I retired, I went every Thursday night during the school year to San Joaquin Delta College to study Greek, because my second son had married a Greek girl from

SHIMAMOTO: Greece. [They were both students at Michigan State University in Michigan. Grant, our son, and Maria Makri were married four years and then divorced. Our four year old grandson, Orestes Tsutomu, went with his mother back to Greece.]* When I retired, it was summer time and so I went to Greece to see my grandson because my former daughter-in-law kept asking me to come. She didn't want her son to forget his Japanese heritage. I stayed three months in Patra, Greece and formed a very close bond with my grandson who was only eight at the time. I was able to go out and speak my Greek. When my grandson was with me, he would say, "Grandma, let me talk, because you talk funny Greek."

MATAGA: [Laughter] He can speak English and Greek. No Japanese.

SHIMAMOTO: No Japanese. He spoke very good English, because when he went to nursery school in Detroit he was four years old. The class did not have any students that were Greek. They could only speak English. So that was the only sounds he heard. So, he spoke beautiful English. In fact, he took a test a few years ago. . . two tests from universities, one in England and one in, I think it's Minnesota, and he got the highest grade so that he could teach anywhere in the world,

* Mrs. Shimamoto added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

SHIMAMOTO: except he was too young. His mother had him go to a lady who had retired who was an English teacher. She was a Greek, and she had gone back to Greece, so he would go there every day after school to her to learn English because Maria didn't want him to forget that. Now he comes every two years to visit his father, and now his father lives down by Thousand Oaks. Grant, our son, is a doctor of microbiology, biochemistry, and immunology. And he's a researcher at Amgen Laboratories. He married again and has two sons by his second wife Kathy, so my little grandson every two years got to be with them. And he would come up here, because he wanted me to spoil him. He'll be coming this year again. [Orestes, our Greek grandson, is now twenty one and is a law student in Athens, Greece.]*

Now, I would like to tell you a little bit about what I did after I retired. [I became a volunteer at our local Lodi Hospital. I also joined the Lodi Garden Club and resigned from the Lodi Business Women's Club. At the time before retiring from work, I was the treasurer of the Northern California Buddhist Women's League for two years. I later became president of the Lodi Buddhist Women's organization.]*

* Mrs. Shimamoto added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

SHIMAMOTO: I joined the docent organization, at the San Joaquin County Historical Society Museum. And after my two years there, I gave a speech about my life on the farm, so they asked me to talk to the docent council. That was my first public speaking. A terrible experience. [Chuckle] Then soon after that, they needed a speaker for the JACL installation. And I think I had one week to prepare. And I said, "Can't you get somebody else?" "No, we need you." So, I was the keynote speaker. I spoke on the Isseis. Then after that, I had all these organizations calling me, and I gave fifteen speeches in three years. Let's see. I spoke to the JACL, and the Congregational Church, the Lodi Historical Society, Lodi Business and Professional Women, Stockton Retired Teachers, Stockton Friends of the Library, the Asian Women's Society, and a church group that Yoshi went with me. I don't remember what that was. I spoke at the Modesto Junior College and I spoke in Stockton to the Genealogical Society. These were all similar subjects. And my last speech was last year. I spoke to the Wednesday Club. I spoke about my Escalon experience. In 1992, I was presented with the Golden Acorn Award as Outstanding Volunteer Docent of the San Joaquin County Museum.

MATAGA: Congratulations.

SHIMAMOTO: Thank you. And in 1997, my health was getting kind of bad. I was doing so many things.

YAMAUCHI: [Inaudible]

SHIMAMOTO: And so, I said I wanted to quit. They wouldn't let me quit and they made me Docent Emeritus.

MATAGA: [Laughter]

SHIMAMOTO: While I was a docent, everytime a Japanese group would come from Japan, I was the one that had to talk to them. My husband helped me a lot, because I didn't know how to speak real nice. The Sister City, Kofu Sister City came to Lodi with their group. Wives and other people. And of course, they had to see the museum, and I knew that I had to talk a higher level Japanese. So, I wrote down in *hiragana* [Japanese phonetic characters] how to talk. And when they came with their suits on and the Mayor started to shake my hand, I just bowed real deep. He looked at me so surprised. And all the other guys around there and their wives were all so surprised. And I gave this wonderful speech. [Laughter] They were impressed. Then we went all around the different buildings and I explained what they were and what they did, and when we got to this nice threshing machine I asked him, "What you call this?" And I told him what it does, and he said, "It's too big to put in Japan farms." They just had small equipment. And then I

gave a tour to a basketball group and then the JACL had a party for them that night. And the big argument was where to seat them, by the door or by the kitchen.

YAMAUCHI: [Inaudible]

SHIMAMOTO: Yoshi explain that.

YAMAUCHI: Well, this is what my mother told me. That when you have a guest from Japan, you never seat them close to the door that leads outside or to the kitchen because that's not a good place. You seat them as far away from the kitchen and as far away from the back door as possible. That way, [inaudible]. If you seat them close to the back door, it's like you want them to go home right away. So, I brought that up. They were saying, "Well, how are we going to set the tables." And I said, "Well, you know this is what my mother used to tell me." They were going to seat the honored guests by the kitchen door. And my mother used to say you never do that. But people there in Lodi had never heard that. They didn't know. They didn't know that. And so finally, I asked Mrs. Ito about it, and she said, "Yes," she said, "In Japan that's right. We don't seat them like that."

MATAGA: I think even in regular restaurants you don't seat people by the kitchen door. You don't seat them by the bathroom door. You know. It's not uncommon.

SHIMAMOTO: Well, we ended up by having them line up by the kitchen, because there was no place else to put them.

YAMAUCHI: [Inaudible]

SHIMAMOTO: And all this was a good experience for me because I learned more Japanese.

MATAGA: Have you told your children about all this and what your life and. . .

SHIMAMOTO: No.

MATAGA: In camp or what you experienced?

SHIMAMOTO: No. Niseis never talked about it. In fact, they had a program on television, and my daughter was so excited and she talked with me about it, and I told her a little bit. But, it was a shameful experience. As we were lined up to get on the train to go back east we had to line up and go down the subway and turn around and get into the train station, there were people lined up on both sides, not saying a word. And there were GIs with guns already to attack us if we did anything. And there were old men and women, young girls, mothers, little children, and real young boys. The rest were in the service. And I hung my head. . . most of us hung our heads, because we were ashamed. We were prisoners. Bitter things like that that we don't forget. To this day, I don't feel safe. I feel that anytime, some big thing could happen and it could happen over again. It's like

when the GIs were trapped in that place, and we tried to rescue them with helicopters in India. . . where was that? We had yellow ribbons all over. . .

MATAGA; Oh, you mean in the Middle East?

SHIMAMOTO: Yes, in the Middle East.

MATAGA; Beirut or Lebanon, or something.

SHIMAMOTO: I heard people say that we should lock them up, send them away. The ones that's living here. It reminded me of how easy it would be for this kind of thing to happen.

I was a "Pink Lady". I became a docent. I was the vice president of the Docent Council and I was the docent trainer for five years. I trained the new docents that came in. When it was my turn to be president, I refused, and I said I wanted to teach. So, instead of the two-year curriculum, they asked me to change it to one year. So, all summer I worked at it, and made it. . .

MATAGA: That's at the Micke Grove [inaudible].

SHIMAMOTO: And I had five classes before I quit. And I had all this material I just turned it over to the two teachers that were taking my place. I enjoyed it very much, because it was a refreshing experience to talk with the youngsters. And at the museum, it was the agricultural museum. And it's the only accredited agricultural museum in California. Everything in there was like what my father used.

MATAGA: And you. [Laughter]

SHIMAMOTO: So, I could tell them about my experiences. I would show them the hay forks. And then the milking area, I told them when I was a youngster, we would take our jar and go down the street road and buy a half a gallon of milk and they would give us foaming, warm milk right from the cow. And it tasted so good. They would squirt it at the cats that would be lined up, and they would squirt it at each cat. This little girl raised her hand and said, "In my country, we still do it that way." She was from India. So, I told the youngsters how lucky we were to live in the United States where we have such modern equipment and don't have to work as hard. I put in my little lectures that way.

MATAGA: Are your children living close by? Well, one son is down in Los Angeles.

SHIMAMOTO: Grant, the PhD. scientist is at Amgen Laboratories in Thousand Oaks. Rodney, our oldest son lives in Lodi with his wife Jean and he is an R.N. He's a paramedic teacher. And our daughter, Faith, is an electrical engineer and computer scientist at Lawrence Livermore Lab. Her husband, Kevin Blackwell, is, too. They live in Stockton, California.

Oh, I took up painting. I read books and took up painting, and I painted Mr. William Micke's picture because they didn't have any picture of him. . .

MATAGA: Oh, for Micke Grove Museum.

SHIMAMOTO: Yes. And I thought that was terrible. So, I painted a picture and its sitting in there. I drew the design for three T-shirts and one of them, they're still selling after over six, seven years. They're selling my book, too. It's not mine any more.

MATAGA: Your book is, *To the Land of Bright Promise: The Story of a Pioneer Japanese Truck Farming Family in California's San Joaquin Valley*. By Chiyo Mitori Shimamoto.

YAMAUCHI: [Inaudible]

SHIMAMOTO: Everybody has their own stories. They just don't want to talk about it.

Oh, I took up knitting and crocheting between my customers at the beauty shop. I made a tablecloth and about two or three coats, and a whole bunch of tops. Everyone of the top clothes I made looked funny on me so I gave them to my daughter. Nothing else that was valuable.

MATAGA: How many grandchildren do you have? One in Greece.

SHIMAMOTO: The oldest one has three by two wives. And our son Grant has one, the Greek boy and two German Americans. Our son Grant and his wife Kathy just had another baby, another

boy named Joseph. My daughter Faith refused to have kids. She has horses and cats and dogs.

MATAGA: Do you get to see your family very often any more?

SHIMAMOTO: More than enough. Now that I'm retired and dropped out of everything, just a name only in Garden Club, too. I was up there in Garden Club until I decided that that was enough. I spend my time reading. I love to read. And I have rabbits, they're my pets, and my garden, and my husband. That's my life, now.

YAMAUCHI: Rabbits coming out of her ears.

SHIMAMOTO: One just had ten babies. I now have thirty rabbits.

MATAGA: How did the war experience affect you and your life?

SHIMAMOTO: Well, it caused us to be evacuated and dispersed us all over the United States. We got to see and do things and go places that we never would have had a chance to. Due to the 442nd and the Military Intelligence records, there is not the prejudice there used to be. And every organization that I belong to, I'm the only Japanese and very well accepted. I can't get the others to join. And I think it is because having been hurt, you build this invisible wall. You sit in a room and you look to see if there is any other Japanese, you know. I made many nice Caucasian friends.

MATAGA: How do you feel about redress and reparations?

SHIMAMOTO: Well, when the questionnaire first came, I said that we should collect the money to build a retirement home or something like that. They didn't take my advice. It's kind of embarrassing to talk about it with Caucasians. And you know, \$20,000 isn't much. I guess most of it is for donations and the rest for books for myself.

MATAGA: If you can imagine that there were no World War II, what would your life be like?

[End Tape 1, Side B]

Begin Tape 2, Side A]

SHIMAMOTO: One speech was to the Geneealogical Society.

MATAGA: This is Tape 2, Side 1.
Genealogy?

SHIMAMOTO: . . . on a rainy night in Stockton. Since it was their organization, I told them about how I would like to tell them my experience. When we had a party to introduce our new in-laws. . . my granddaughter Emily was just about four years old. I took her to the restroom, and I told her cousins, "This is your cousin." And they said, "She's not our cousin." They lived in Woodland. So, I decided that I needed to have a family tree. And not studying like I should have first, I got some butcher paper and put down nine children's names. There was no more room. So I went back to the butcher shop and got a longer piece of

paper. And by the time you get to the next generation, there was no more room again. And then I happened to be reading a book where they put the names vertically, so I thought that's a good idea. So I had quite a large sheet of paper and I did it--my parents' generation, and our generation, and our children's generation. By the time my son Rodney was married the third time and had children by different wives, I decided to quit. So I made them laugh that night.

MATAGA: I wanted to ask you again, if you can imagine that there was no World War II, what would your life be like now?

SHIMAMOTO: I think it would be very narrow. I wouldn't have had the friendship of Miss Miles to learn all these things culturally and politically and all that which broadened my horizon. I probably would have just married a farmer, which my husband is a farmer, had children and read mystery stories.

MATAGA: If you could imagine if there was another evacuation order, what would you do?

SHIMAMOTO: I would pray that there wasn't one. But if there was, I don't know what I would do. But one thing is, there were. . . our government was lucky that we were trained to be obedient and mind our elders. Because this younger generation, no matter what race, they speak out and cause a lot of problems. In one way, I'm proud of them, and in another

way, I dislike it because all our sacrifices will be forgotten, because of how the young people are acting today.

MATAGA: After redress, what kind of role do you think Japanese Americans should play in society.

SHIMAMOTO: I think they should take more part in society. They have this imagined wall. It's like somebody would invite you over their house for a party or a dinner, and "No, I can't go. I'm too busy." Or one thing or another. Actually, it's because we don't want to be embarrassed in a group of non-Japanese. They may stare at us, or be over friendly and we would be very much ill at ease. And I think this is the problem. I don't have that problem myself, I think, because I went out [of camp] early, and I was exposed to the Caucasian society. I had joined the Unitarian Church, and we came back to Lodi, my husband and I joined that church, until we decided we'd better hurry up and be Buddhist, again. I still feel like I'm a Unitarian.

MATAGA: What kind of life do you see for your grandchildren?

SHIMAMOTO: My grandchildren are all so mixed that I don't think they would have any trouble at all. All I want them to be are happy adults. That's all I ask.

MATAGA: What do you think are the greatest contributions by the Nisei men and women.

SHIMAMOTO: Yoshi, it's you. Not me

Well, we are model citizens, our second generation.

There had never been a Japanese in Folsom Prison until the third generation came along. I don't know about them.

MATAGA: If you were giving advice to young people today, what would you tell them?

SHIMAMOTO: Honor your family, and honor your race, and your country no matter what.

MATAGA: We are nearing the end of this interview, is there anything else you would like to say?

SHIMAMOTO: I think I talked too much.

MATAGA: [Laughter] Do you have any questions for me?

SHIMAMOTO: How old are you?

MATAGA: [Laughter] Over fifty. Thank you for sharing your story with us. This is the end of the interview. And the other comments by the third person was by Yoshi Yamauchi, who is also a member of the Lodi JACL, Thank you, Chiyo.

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[End of Interview]

NAMES LIST

NAME	IDENTIFICATION	SOURCE OF VERIFICATION	PAGE INTRODUCED
Kango Mitori	Father	Chiyo Shimamoto	2
Katsume Mitori	Mother	"	2
Kimi	Oldest sister	"	3
Ida Aiko	Third sister	"	3
Ayako	Fourth sister	"	5
Ishi	Fifth sister	"	5
Mutsuko Alice	Sixth sister	"	5
Robert Minoru	Brother	"	5
Jean Tsukimi	Seventh sister	"	5
Ann Yae	Eighth sister	"	5
George Yabuki Mrs. Yabuki	Farmed rented land on which Mitori family were sharecroppers	"	7
Charles Ray	Owner of Beauty Shop in St. Paul, MN	"	17
Miss Luella Miles	Befriended Chiyo	"	18
Fritz Kreisler	Violinist	Webster's Dictionary	18
Marian Anderson	Contralto	"	18
Lily Pons	French soprano	"	18
Henry Wallace	U.S. politician	"	18
Hubert Humphrey	Political Science teacher at McAllister College in St Paul, MN	Chiyo Shimamoto	18
Iwao Frank Shimamoto	Husband	"	19
Rodney Akira Shimamoto	Eldest son	"	19
Mr. T. Yamanaka	Vineyard owner, husband's uncle	"	20
Grant Tsuyoshi Shimamoto	Second son	"	20
Faith Yachiyo	Daughter	"	21

NAMES LIST

NAME	IDENTIFICATION	SOURCE OF VERIFICATION	PAGE INTRODUCED
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Orestes Tsutomu Shimamoto	Grandson in Greece	"	22
Jean Shimamoto	Wife of son Rodney	"	29
Kevin Blackwell	Husband of daughter Faith	"	29
William Micke	Namesake of park and Museum	"	30
Kathy Shimamoto	Wife of son Grant	"	30



TO THE LAND OF BRIGHT PROMISE

The Story of a
Pioneer Japanese
Truck Farming Family
in California's
San Joaquin Valley

By Chiyo Mitori
Shimamoto